

TOY SAFETY

When buying toys, choose toys with care. You should keep in mind the child's age, interests and skill level. Always look for quality design and construction in all toys for all ages. You should make sure that all directions or instructions are clear to you, and, when appropriate, to the child. Plastic wrappings on toys should be discarded at once before they become deadly playthings. You should develop the habit of reading labels. Look for and heed age recommendations, such as "Not recommended for children under three". Other labels to look for include: "Flame retardant/Flame resistant" on fabric products and "Washable/hygienic materials" on stuffed toys and dolls.

You should check all toys periodically for breakage and potential hazards. A damaged or dangerous toy should be thrown away or repaired immediately. Edges on wooden toys that might have become sharp or surfaces covered with splinters should be sanded smooth. When repainting toys and toy boxes, you should avoid using leftover paint, unless purchased recently, since older paints may contain more lead than new paint, which is regulated by the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC). You should examine all outdoor toys regularly for rust or weak parts that could become hazardous. New toys intended for children less than eight years of age should, by regulation, be free of sharp glass or metal edges. However, with use older toys may break, exposing cutting edges. You should check toys periodically for such hazards. Older toys can break to reveal parts small enough to be swallowed or to become lodged in a child's windpipe, ears, or nose. The law bans small parts in new toys intended for children under three. This includes removable small eyes and noses on stuffed toys and dolls, and small, removable squeakers on squeeze toys. Toys which have been broken may have dangerous points or prongs. Stuffed toys may have wires inside the toy which could cut or stab if exposed. A CPSC regulation prohibits sharp points in new toys and other articles intended for use by children under eight years of age.

Toy caps and some noisemaking guns and other toys can produce sounds at noise levels that can damage hearing. The law requires the following label on boxes of caps producing noise above a certain level: "WARNING-Do not fire closer than one foot to the ear. Do not use indoors." Caps producing noise that can injure a child's hearing are banned.

Toys with long strings or cords may be dangerous for infants and very young children. The cords may become wrapped around an infant's neck, causing strangulation. You should never hang toys with long strings, cords, loops, or ribbons in cribs or playpens where children can become entangled. You should remove crib gyms for the crib when

the child can pull up on hands and knees; some children have strangled when they fell across crib gyms stretched across the crib.

Projectiles, guided missiles and similar flying toys, can be turned into weapons and can injure eyes in particular. Children should never be permitted to play with adult lawn darts or other hobby or sporting equipment that have sharp points. Arrows or darts used by children should have soft cork tips, rubber suction cups or other protective tips intended to prevent injury. Always check to be sure the tips are secure. Avoid those dart guns or other toys which might be capable of firing articles not intended for use in the toy, such as pencils or nails.

All toys are not for all children. You should keep toys designed for older children out of the hands of little ones. Always follow labels that give age recommendations; some toys are recommended for older children because they may be hazardous in the hands of a younger child. You should teach older children to help keep their toys away from younger brothers and sisters. Even balloons, when uninflated or broken, can choke or suffocate if young children try to swallow them. More children have suffocated on uninflated balloons and pieces of broken balloons than on any other type of toy.

Electric toys that are improperly constructed, wired or misused can shock or burn. Electric toys must meet mandatory requirements for maximum surface temperatures, electrical construction and prominent warning labels. Electric toys with heating elements are recommended only for children over eight years old. Children should be taught to use electric toys properly, cautiously and under adult supervision.

You should teach children to put their toys safely away on shelves or in a toy chest after playing to prevent trips and falls. Toy boxes should be checked for safety. Always use a toy chest that has a lid that will stay open in any position to which it is raised, and will not fall unexpectedly on a child. For extra safety, be sure there are ventilation holes for fresh air. Watch for sharp edges that could cut and hinges that could pinch or squeeze.

Protecting children from unsafe toys is the responsibility of everyone. Careful toy selection and proper supervision of children at play is still, and always will be, the best way to protect children from toy-related injuries. To report a product hazard or a product-related injury, write to the U. S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Washington, DC 20207, or call the toll-free hotline: 1-800-638-2772.